Watershed Development". These guidelines, framed on the basis of the recommendations of the high level committee headed by Prof. C.H. Hanumantha Rao provide for monitoring mechanism both at the State and District levels, sufficient enough to meet the requirements of implementation of the watershed projects.

Grants to State Governments to improve infrastructures

5608. SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH LIBRA:
SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA:

Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal to give grant to the State Governments for improving their infrastructures like construction of roads/ bridges on link roads to facilitate farmers and to bring their produce to the market; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) and (b) Government are presently engaged in the process of formulating a National Rural Roads Programme (NRRP) for construction of roads in rural areas of the country.

Panchayat elections in States

5609. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the States which failed to hold elections to Panchayats under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act; and

(b) the action taken against them to expedite the elections?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) and (b) The States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bihar, the NCT of Delhi and the Union Territory of Pondicherry have yet to conduct Panchayat elections, after commencement of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992.

The Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill, 1997 is pending and Presidential Assent was withheld as the Bill did not provide for reservations for Scheduled Castes in Panchayats. The Constitution (86th Amendment) Bill, 1999 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha (in December, 1999) with a view to exempting Arunachal Pradesh from making provision for such reservation in Panchayats.

The Panchayati Raj Acts passed in Bihar and Pondicherry were challenged in the courts and the matter has been subjudice. The Governments of Bihar and Pondicherry have been advised to take steps for early disposal of the cases.

The Government of India have also been requesting the Government of Assam in regard to conducting Panchayat elections in the State, which are expected to be held in September-October, 2000. The Panchayati Raj System in the NCT of Delhi was suspended before the commencement of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992.

Most backward districts

5610. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken to identify the most backward districts in the country and the really poor rural communities; and

(b) the strategies proposed to deal with their problems to make them prosperous due to rural development activities?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) A Committee (headed by Principal Adviser, Planning Commission) was constituted in 1997 to, *inter alia,* identify the 100 most backward/poorest districts in the country. The broad parameters adopted by the Committee to analyze the causes of backwardness, included indicators of deprivation (poverty ratio) and social and economic infrastructure. The 100 most backward/poorest districts identified by the Committee included 38 districts in Bihar, 19 districts in Madhya Pradesh, 17 districts in Uttar Pradesh, 10 districts in Maharashtra, 4 districts each in Orissa and West Bengal, 2 districts each in Rajasthan and Sikkim and 1 district each in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

(b) The Ministry of Rural Development are implementing programmes pertaining, *inter alia,* to poverty alleviation, employment generation, infrastructure developement, wartershed schemes, social security and land reforms, with a view to improve the quality of life in the rural areas and assist people below the poverty line. These programmes are being closely monitored and are being evaluated from time to time. The programmes implemented for the development of backward areas have helped in improving the living conditions in these areas.